FLORIN DIACU OBITUARY

Florin Diacu passed away on February 13, 2018. Florin was an award-winning mathematician and author, and a former Vice President of the Canadian Mathematical Society (CMS). He authored 7 books, over 60 research papers, and several popular science, newspaper and encyclopedia articles.

Florin Diacu was born in Sibiu, Romania, on April 24, 1959. He graduated with a Diploma in Mathematics from the University of Bucharest in 1983. After graduation he worked as a high-school teacher in Mediaş, a small town in Transylvania, doing research in his spare time that would later become his PhD thesis. Defecting from communist Romania in 1988, he earned a Ph.D. in Mathematics at the University of Heidelberg in 1989. After his PhD he held a visiting position at the University of Dortmund, and then became a post-doctoral fellow at the Centre de Recherches Mathematiques (CRM) in Montreal.

Florin began his academic and teaching career in 1991 at the University of Victoria in British Columbia (UVic), where he remained for 26 years. He also held short-term visiting positions at the Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand (1993), University of Bucharest (1998), University of Pernambuco in Recife, Brazil (1999), and The Bernoulli Centre of the EPFL in Lausanne, Switzerland (2004). In 2017, he went on leave from UVic to take up a position at the Yale-NUS College in Singapore where he was a Professor and Head of Studies of Mathematical, Computational & Statistical Sciences, until his death. During his career at UVic, Florin supervised 8 Masters students and 4 PhD students, including the authors of this obituary.

Florin's research focused on qualitative aspects of the n-body problem of celestial mechanics. From the early 1990s until the early 2000s his work consisted in studying modifications of the classical Newtonian n-body problem to problems with quasihomogeneous potentials. Florin's work on these topics stimulated a sizable number of papers by many different authors. In the mid 2000s his work was inspired by a conjecture of Don Saari, which states that every solution of the n-body problem with constant moment of inertia is a relative equilibrium. From the second half of the 2000s he concentrated on the n-body problem in spaces of constant curvature. His work in this direction was awarded the prestigious SIAM Crawford Prize, the prize citation praising his "novel approach to the n-body problem in curved space, blending dynamical systems, differential geometry, and geometric and celestial mechanics in a lucid, inspirational manner".

Florin was also the author of several books. He wrote two monographs, one on celestial mechanics and one on the n-body problem in spaces of constant curvature, as

well as a differential equations textbook. An energetic and passionate writer, he had a gift for turning complex mathematics into simple-seeming and fascinating stories. He authored three popular science books: "*Celestial Encounters: The Origins of Chaos and Stability*" (coauthored with P. Holmes, this was one of Choice Magazine's Outstanding Academic Titles for 1997); "*The Lost Millennium: History's Timetables Under Siege*"; and "*Megadisasters: The Science of Predicting the Next Catastrophe*" (one of Choice's Outstanding Academic Titles for 2010).

In addition to his research and writing activities, Florin served the mathematical profession in many ways, especially through the Canadian scientific societies. He was the University of Victoria site director of the Pacific Institute for the Mathematical Sciences (PIMS) between 1999 and 2003, and an editor of PIMS magazine "Pi in the Sky" for many years. Between 2012 and 2015 he served the CMS as the Research Notes Editor to the Notes, from 2015 to 2017 he was Vice President of the CMS, and between 2013 and 2017 he was an associate editor of the Canadian Journal of Mathematics and the Canadian Mathematical Bulletin. He also served as a member of the NSERC Mathematics Scholarships and Fellowships Committee and the NSERC Mathematics and Statistics Committee and Evaluation Group. He was an editor for Libertas Mathematica and the Romanian Astronomical Journal.

Florin has had a lasting impact on the lives of many, and on mathematics. His determined and consistent efforts have blazed new trails in celestial mechanics and invited others to walk them. One year after his passing, he is still greatly missed.